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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the hypothesis that an employer's hiring decisions are influenced by certain speech characteristics of prospective employees. Simulated job interviews of four different speakers were played for 62 employers involved in actual hiring. Sets of semantic differential scales were used to measure employer's attitudes towards the speakers. Employers also indicated the probability of hiring the prospective employees for job categories ranging from white collar to manual labor. The results demonstrated that employers seem to base judgments about intelligence, job competence, self-assurance, agreeability, and ethnicity on speech characteristics. The results also indicate that employers' ratings of speech characteristics are fair predictors of employability for higher job categories, but have little predictive value for the manual labor positions. (LG)

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SPEECH CHARACTERISTICS AND EMPLOYABILITY

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SPEECH CHARACTERISTICS AND EMPLOYABILITY

The present research focused upon relationships between employers' attitudes toward speech samples and the employers' hiring decisions with regard to the speakers. The thesis was that an interviewee's speech characteristics furnish cues which form employer's attitudes toward the speaker. These attitudes influence employment decisions.

The theoretical model for this research comes from studies which have related language and attitudes in educational settings. Essentially, such research has shown that speech samples elicit stereotypes in the minds of listeners, and these stereotypes influence judgments of the speakers. Lambert and his colleagues (1960) for example, found that both French Canadian and English Canadian college students rated English speakers more favorably than the same speakers speaking French. Williams (1970) extended this line of research by measuring listeners' attitudes toward speech samples and describing these listeners' stereotyping behaviors in response to the speakers. More specifically, he examined relationships between cues in childrens' speech and the stereotypes this speech elicited in teachers. Williams' method was to construct a set of semantic differential scales from adjectives provided by the teachers themselves and to have teachers use these scales to evaluate taped samples of fifth-grade children's speech. A factor analysis of teachers' semantic differential responses

revealed two dimensions of judgments which were labeled confidence-eagerness and ethnicity-nonstandardness. Judgments of confidence-eagerness appeared to be related to reticence in speech, incidence of hesitation phenomena, and tendency to maintain a conversation. Ethnicity-nonstandardness indicated judgments of the child's race and the frequency of nonstandard dialect features in his speech. Williams (1970) found that teachers tended to rate Black children quite similarly, regardless of the actual speech characteristics of the child. This was taken as evidence that some teachers may have been reporting a stereotype of a child of a particular race or social status rather than making differentiations on the basis of the language sample.

The present research extends this framework to the employment interview dyads. Though it has become a commonplace of American education that children must learn to speak effectively in order to be successful in job interviews, there has been little systematic study of communication or attitudes within employment interview situations. Shuy (1970), on the basis of reactions of 16 employers to tapes of 16 male speakers, concluded that "speech is directly proportionate to employability." Lower working-class speakers were most often designated as unemployable.

Using semantic differential techniques, the present researchers attempted to ascertain dimensions of employers'

judgments of speech of prospective employees, and to relate these judgments to hiring decisions relative to the speakers.

STUDY ONE

Method

Subjects.

Subjects were professional employment interviewers--persons who, as part of their regular job routines, conducted employment interviews and made hiring decisions. A total of 76 employers participated in the study. They were contacted by telephoning organizations listed in an Austin, Texas, Chamber of Commerce document as employing 200 or more persons.

Materials.

Stimulus tapes. The researchers consulted with several personnel interviewers to ascertain "typical" questions asked during job interviews. Questions were selected which were deemed likely to solicit extensive responses from interviewees, and which contained no references to particular job categories. Selected questions (for example: "How do you go about solving a problem at work?" "What is your concept of the ideal boss?") were asked of adult males from the Central Texas area. Their responses were tape recorded and edited into 90 second segments.

Response instruments. Sets of semantic differential scales were used to measure employers' attitudes toward the

speakers. There were also items in the questionnaire for employers to indicate hiring decisions in various job categories.

Procedures: Phase I

Four 90-second recordings were played for twelve employment interviewers. After each recording, interviewers were asked to describe their reactions to the speech which had been recorded. Fieldworkers copied all descriptive terms used by the employers. Employers were also asked to indicate whether or not the tapes sounded like a "real job interview." Ten of twelve respondents indicated that the recordings were realistic representations of employment interviews.

Given the adjectives supplied by employers, a set of forty semantic differential scales[1] was constructed. A set of five point scales was developed for employers to indicate the probability that they would hire the person being interviewed for each of seven job categories--executive, public relations, foreman, skilled technician, sales, clerical, and manual labor. Possible responses ranged from "definitely would hire" to "definitely would not hire." Thus the test instrument measured the employer's perception of the interviewee's speech and the probability that he would actually employ the speaker. A copy of the semantic differential instrument is appended to this report.

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[1]For example: THE SPEAKER SOUNDS:
intelligent__:__:__:__:__:__:__unintelligent.

Twenty-three employers were then asked to respond on the test instrument to 90 second samples of simulated interviews for each of four speakers. The speakers were a Black, a Mexican-American, a White ethnic (southern), and a Standard English speaker.

Results

Factor analysis of the 40 attitude scales revealed four factors composed of 19 scales. When those scales which loaded lower than .60 were eliminated a four factor, 15 scale instrument remained. (See Table 1) Factor I appeared to be concerned with the speaker's INTELLIGENCE and COMPETENCE to do a job and accounted for 26.4% of the variance. Factor II, composed of four scales measured perception of the speaker's AGREEABLENESS, and accounted for 16.3% of the variance. Factor III appeared to measure perception of the speaker's SELF-ASSURANCE and accounted for 16.5% of the variance. Factor IV was comprised of the single scale ANGLO-LIKE--NON ANGLO-LIKE and accounted for 7.5% of the variance. It was decided to include this scale in subsequent analysis in order to replicate the rather surprising finding that ethnicity seemed to exert little influence either upon speech attitudes or hiring decisions.

Factor analysis of the seven job scales revealed a two factor structure. (See Table 2.) Factor 1 (44.93% variance)

was composed of the five scales PUBLIC RELATIONS EXECUTIVE, FOREMAN, SALES, AND MANUAL LABOR, the last of which loaded negatively. Factor 2 was composed of the scales CLERICAL AND SKILLED TECHNICIAN and accounted for 23.34% of the variance.

Regression analyses were then conducted using standardized job factor scores as criterion variables and the standardized attitude factor scores as predictor variables. Separate analyses were also run using the individual job scales scores as criterion variables. The results of these analyses are summarized in Table 3.

The highest predictive capability for the four factors was obtained with composite job Factor 1, which involved basically white-collar types of jobs.

Analysis of job Factor 2 and the individual hiring decision scales indicate that an employer's perception of speech characteristics has greater predictive value when the decision is being made relative to a white collar or supervisory type of position, than when it is relative to a clerical or technical position.

These findings indicate that employers seem to make judgments about the intelligence and competence of a person to do a job, his self-assurance, his agreeability, and his ethnicity. Further it seems likely that knowledge of these judgments are of value in predicting the employment decision. The employment decision appears to be based primarily upon employer perception of the speaker's ability to perform a job

and to a lesser extent, perception of his confidence. Relatively little emphasis is placed on the degree to which the potential employee is perceived to be agreeable and dependable and still less on the degree to which he is perceived to be Anglo-like.

Since the background for the present research was a series of studies in which it was found that judgments of ethnicity and nonstandardness predicted expectation of student performance in class, it is of interest to note that judgments of ethnicity appear to have had little relation to the employment decision. The researchers speculate that recent Federal legislation designed to eliminate the effects of ethnicity on employability may actually be having the desired effect on employers. Many of the employers interviewed appeared to be sensitive to the necessity of making available jobs to members of minority groups and many indicated strongly that their establishments were making energetic efforts to assure fair treatment of such people. The results obtained indicate that the main concern of these employers was whether the interviewee was capable of performing the task to which he was assigned. Such considerations, along with a desire for replication and validation of the test instrument, led directly to the second study.

STUDY TWO

Method

Procedures

Utilizing the 14 scale instrument developed earlier, fieldworkers presented forty employers from the same Austin list with taped samples of persons answering questions typical of the employment interview. Speakers for this study included two Blacks, one White "deep South" speaker, and one standard English speaker. Employers again listened to 90-second samples of each speaker, rated the speech, as well as the probability that he would hire him for each of five job categories.

Results

Factor analysis of the attitude scales revealed a factor structure almost identical to that found earlier. (See Table 4.) Three factors accounted for 67% of the variance in the model. Factor I consisted of the five scales organized--disorganized, concise--repetitive, intelligent--unintelligent, straightforward--evasive, and thorough--superficial, accounting for 28% of the variance, and seemed to represent a judgment of the speaker's overall competence to perform a job. Factor II consisted of the scales agreeable-disagreeable, cooperative--uncooperative, and warm--cold, and accounted for 18% of the variance.

Factor III accounted for 21% of the variance, and the three scales relaxed--tense, calm--frightened, and self-assured--timid, all loaded negatively on the factor. All eleven of these scales loaded higher than .65 with the three factors.

On the basis of the factor analysis conducted in the two studies, it was concluded that employers make stable judgments of the speech characteristics of persons being interviewed for employment. These judgments appear to be concerned with whether an applicant is COMPETENT, AGREEABLE, and SELF-ASSURED.

Factor analysis of the five employability scales revealed two factors (Table 5). Factor 1 consisted of the scales "executive, foreman," and "skilled technician" while Factor 2 was comprised of the scales "clerical" and "manual". This represented a change from the first study where "manual" had loaded negatively on Factor 1 and skilled technician had loaded with clerical occupations. This led to the conclusion that employers' groupings of job categories might not be as stable as their judgments of speech characteristics.

Standardized factor scores for the two employability factors and the three speech rating factors were obtained and regression analyses were conducted using as predictors the attitude factor scores and the employability ratings on each of the two factors as criterion variables. Model one (Table 6) revealed a multiple R of .54 for the three attitude factors of Factor 1 of the employability scales, indicating that the

attitude factors explained 29% of the variance in the criterion variable. This correlation was significant beyond the .001 level of significance. Model Two, using job Factor 2, as the criterion revealed no significant correlations between speech ratings and employment decisions.

Due to the instability of the employability factors, separate regression analyses were conducted using each of the five employability scales as criterion variables. The results of these analyses (both by individual scales and composite employment-decision factors) appears in Table 6.

These results indicate that employer ratings of speech characteristics are fair predictors of employability for the higher job categories but have no predictive value for the manual category. While the relative contributions on the five job scales make sense, and four of the models yield R's significantly greater than zero the findings in Study Two represent a drop in predictive value from those of Study One.

A discriminant analysis (Table 7) of the hiring decisions for each of the four speakers revealed significant differences only for the executive job category. The standard English speaker was rated as being the most employable. For the category of foreman, the difference approached significance with the standard English speaker again being the most favored. For those positions perceived as being of a less white-collar or

supervisory nature, differences between judgments of the four speakers were nonsignificant. This analysis confirms the judgment that speech characteristics have greater predictive value when the application is for a white collar type of position, and that employers will tend to favor standard English speakers for those positions.

DISCUSSION

The major finding of this project was in the stability of employers' attitude judgments. The three-factor structure (INTELLIGENT - COMPETENT; SELF-ASSURED; AGREEABLE) of employer judgments was replicated across 62 employers and two sets of stimulus materials.

Only the first of these factors, INTELLIGENT - COMPETENT, served as a consistent predictor of employment decisions. And its predictability was strongest in distinctly higher-status occupations. Added to the phase II discriminant analysis which showed significant differences among speakers only for the executive job decision, this suggests that employee speech characteristics and the employer attitudes which they stimulate are important predictors in success of job interviews for executive and supervisory positions. This is reasonable, since the work in such positions is highly speech-related.

In contrast, speech seems less important as a predictor of success in job interviews for manual labor positions. This is again intuitively reasonable, since speaking the standard dialect may be less effective in such positions.

Between these extremes lie the categories of foreman, clerical, and technical positions. Speech appears to be a

partial predictor of success in these interviews, but perhaps not a vital one.

Future research may clear up some of the questions raised in Study Two. It is possible that the inclusion of a second Black speaker may have reduced variation in the employability scales somewhat. Study Two tapes were also judged less content-free than the Study One tapes, and there were two interviewers asking speakers the questions, which may have induced unaccounted-for variance.

The present research does suggest these lines of further research. First, it would be informative to use larger numbers of speaker tapes, in which there were representative samples of ethnic groups, both sexes, all social class groupings, and ages. Second, it would be interesting to analyze employer ratings using Q-analysis techniques to ascertain "kinds of employers," in terms of how they make hiring decisions. This would be similar to a study by Naremore (1970) in a teacher population.

Finally, it would be informative to manipulate the speech samples in terms of particular linguistic or usage aspects of their speech, to see if such particular variations affected employment decisions. It is anticipated that such tapes could be made by linguistic informants capable of code-switching. It would also be interesting to provide employers

with additional information about the speakers, either by using videotapes (to add a visual dimension) or by using written vita sheets (to add a dimension of qualifications, experience, etc.).

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TABLE 1

Rotated factor matrix of employers' responses to stimuli (Phase I)

Variables	Factors I	II	III	IV
1. Eager	.67*	.27	.09	.06
2. Cooperative	.28	.71*	-.13	.08
3. Agreeable	.08	.81*	.06	-.01
4. Self-assured	.28	.03	.73*	-.03
5. Relaxed	.12	.07	.84	.14
6. Expresses self well	.67*	.15	.54	-.10
7. Organized	.76*	.08	.36	.09
8. Thorough	.66*	.30	.26	-.23
9. Warm	.07	.66*	.41	-.23
10. Straightforward	.68*	.23	.34	.00
11. Intelligent	.79*	.13	.07	-.01
12. Dependable	.24	.72*	.16	.11
13. Concise	.75*	.14	.09	.16
14. Calm	.37	.02	.60*	.28
15. Anglo-like	.04	.02	.14	.89*
% total variance	26.4	16.3	16.5	7.5

*Items loading highest on factor indicated.

TABLE 2

Rotated factor matrix of employers' hiring decisions (Phase I)

Variable	Factors 1	2
1. Skilled Technician	.24	.86*
2. Clerical	-.11	.88*
3. Manual Labor	-.56*	.21
4. Public Relations	.88*	.01
5. Executive	.86*	.05
6. Foreman	.79*	.17
7. Sales	.79*	.19
% total variance	45	23

*Items loading highest on factor indicated.

TABLE 3

Prediction of hiring decisions from four attitude factors (Phase I)

Job Category	R	R^2	Relative contributions of factors			
			I*	II	III	IV
Clerical	.43**	.18	.12	.02	.03	.01
Skilled Technician	.34**	.11	.03	.03	.00	.04
Manual Labor	.40**	.16	.13	.00	.02	.01
Public Relations	.59**	.35	.26	.01	.08	.00
Executive	.56**	.31	.13	.04	.14	.00
Foreman	.65**	.42	.33	.00	.07	.02
Sales	.60**	.36	.23	.01	.11	.01
Composite Factor 1	.68**	.47	.33	.01	.13	.00
Composite Factor 2	.36**	.13	.05	.03	.00	.03

*Attitude Factors
I = Intelligence--Competence
II = Agreeable--Dependable
III = Relaxed--Self-assured
IV = Anglo-like--Non Anglo-like

**$p < .01$ for d.f. 3,88

TABLE 4

Rotated factor matrix of employers' responses to stimuli (Phase II)

Variables	Factors I	II	III
1. Organized	.81*	.09	-.20
2. Calm	.22	.27	-.83*
3. Warm	.08	.71*	-.25
4. Thorough	.68*	.30	-.10
5. Concise	.77*	.05	-.21
6. Cooperative	.10	.79*	-.20
7. Agreeable	.28	.80*	.00
8. Intelligent	.74*	.22	-.07
9. Relaxed	.17	.11	-.86*
10. Straightforward	.69*	.05	-.30
11. Self-assured	.35	.14	-.76*
% total variance	28	18	21

*Items loading highest on factor indicated.

TABLE 5

Rotated factor matrix of employers' hiring decision (Phase II)

Variable	Factors 1	2
1. Executive	.85*	-.03
2. Foreman	.86*	.13
3. Skilled technician	.74*	.35
4. Manual Labor	-.12	.85*
5. Clerical	.07	.55*
% total variance	.42	.26

*Items loading highest on factor indicated.

TABLE 6

Prediction of hiring decisions from three attitude factors (Phase II)

Model No.	Job Category	R	R^2	Relative Contribution: Intelligent-Competent	Relative Contribution: Agreeable-Dependable	Relative Contribution: Relaxed-Self-assured
3	Executive	.38**	,14	.13	.01	.00
4	Foreman	.38**	.14	.14	.00	.00
5	Skilled Technician	.36**	.13	.12	.01	.00
6	Manual Labor	.18	.03	.02	.000	.01
7	Clerical	.28**	.08	.05	.00	.05
1	Composite Factor 1 (Ex., Forman, Sk. T.)	.54**	.29	.26	.03	.00
2	Composite Factor 2 (Clerical, Manual)	.17	.03	.01	.00	.02

**$p < .01$ for d.f. 2,157

TABLE 7

Discriminant analysis of 4 speakers by hiring decisions

Variable	Group mean I	II	III	IV	p
Executive	3.65	3.45	3.82	2.87*	.002
Foreman	3.10	2.92	3.45	2.87	.07
Skilled Tech.	2.82	2.92	2.75	2.42	.17
Manual Labor	3.20	3.57	3.05	3.32	.26
Clerical	3.00	4.30	4.10	4.60	.17

*Low score indicates a greater probability of employment

I=Black speaker #1
II-Black speaker #2
III=White ethnic speaker
IV=Standard English speaker

TABLE 8 Scales used to index the two-factor model in study one:

THE SPEAKER SOUNDS: limited__:__:__:__:__:__:__versatile*
THE SPEAKER SOUNDS: *confident__:__:__:__:__:__:__unsure
THE SPEAKER: has problems communicating__:__:__:__:__:__:__communicates well*
THE SPEAKER SOUNDS: cold__:__:__:__:__:__:__warm

THE SPEAKER SOUNDS: disadvantaged__:__:__:__:__:__:__advantaged*
THE SPEAKER SOUNDS: hard to understand__:__:__:__:__:__:__easy to understand*
THE SPEAKER SOUNDS: hesitant__:__:__:__:__:__:__fluent*
THE SPEAKER SOUNDS: *Anglo-like__:__:__:__:__:__:__non Anglo-like

THE SPEAKER'S BACKGROUND IS: different from mine__:__:__:__:__:__:__like mine*
THE SPEAKER SOUNDS: lazy__:__:__:__:__:__:__energetic*
THE SPEAKER SOUNDS: *tall__:__:__:__:__:__:__short
THE SPEAKER SOUNDS: *eager__:__:__:__:__:__:__reticent

THE SPEAKER SOUNDS: *interested__:__:__:__:__:__:__uninterested
THE SPEAKER SOUNDS: *calm__:__:__:__:__:__:__frightened
THE SPEAKER SOUNDS: *cooperative__:__:__:__:__:__:__uncooperative
THE SPEAKER SOUNDS: *casual__:__:__:__:__:__:__formal

THE SPEAKER SOUNDS: *dependable__:__:__:__:__:__:__undependable
THE SPEAKER SOUNDS: *educated__:__:__:__:__:__:__uneducated
THE SPEAKER SOUNDS: *fast__:__:__:__:__:__:__slow
THE SPEAKER SOUNDS: *enthusiastic__:__:__:__:__:__:__lacking in enthusiasm

THE SPEAKER SOUNDS: repetitive__:__:__:__:__:__:__concise*
THE SPEAKER SOUNDS: old__:__:__:__:__:__:__young*
THE SPEAKER SOUNDS: disorganized__:__:__:__:__:__:__organized*
THE SPEAKER SOUNDS: evasive__:__:__:__:__:__:__straightforward*

THE SPEAKER: uses many words__:__:__:__:__:__:__uses few words*
THE SPEAKER SOUNDS: *thorough__:__:__:__:__:__:__superficial
THE SPEAKER HAS A: bad voice__:__:__:__:__:__:__good voice *
THE SPEAKER'S TONE IS: even__:__:__:__:__:__:__varied*

THE SPEAKER SOUNDS: *cheerful__:__:__:__:__:__:__sad
THE SPEAKER: *expresses himself well__:__:__:__:__:__:__poorly
THE SPEAKER SOUNDS: *relaxed__:__:__:__:__:__:__tense
THE SPEAKER SOUNDS: impractical__:__:__:__:__:__:__practical*

THE SPEAKER IS A: poor learner__:__:__:__:__:__:__good learner*
THE SPEAKER SOUNDS: incoherent__:__:__:__:__:__:__coherent*
THE SPEAKER SOUNDS: *decisive__:__:__:__:__:__:__indecisive
THE SPEAKER SOUNDS: unintelligent__:__:__:__:__:__:__intelligent*

THE SPEAKER SOUNDS: unfriendly__:__:__:__:__:__:__friendly*
THE SPEAKER SOUNDS: timid__:__:__:__:__:__:__self-assured*
THE SPEAKER SOUNDS: disagreeable__:__:__:__:__:__:__agreeable*
THE SPEAKER SOUNDS: unsure of himself__:__:__:__:__:__:__sure of himself*

*The asterisks define the pole of the scale assigned a value of 1.0 in the quantification scheme; the asterisks did not appear on the actual instrument.